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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR SYNCHRONIZING ON-AIR COMMERCIAL PROGRAMMING WITH INTERACTIVE APPLICATIONS**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**

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H04N 7/025	(2006.01)
H04N 7/52	(2011.01)
H04N 21/242	(2011.01)
H04N 21/8545	(2011.01)
H04N 21/8547	(2011.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***H04N 7/52*** (2013.01); ***H04N 21/242*** (2013.01); ***H04N 21/8545*** (2013.01); ***H04N 21/8547*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

USPC 725/22–23, 32, 34–36, 60–61, 136

See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

There is provided a system and method for the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive applications, providing interactive content synchronized with on-air television programming. There is provided a system comprising a client device with a display device and an input device and running a synchronization application. The client device receives digital data transmitted from a server, and transmits user feedback information generated from user interactions with the digital data back to the server. The digital data are interactive advertisements, such as online social games, that increase users' awareness of the advertised products or messages. The digital data are delivered to the user's client device in synchronization with the broadcasting of on-air television commercials.

16 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets

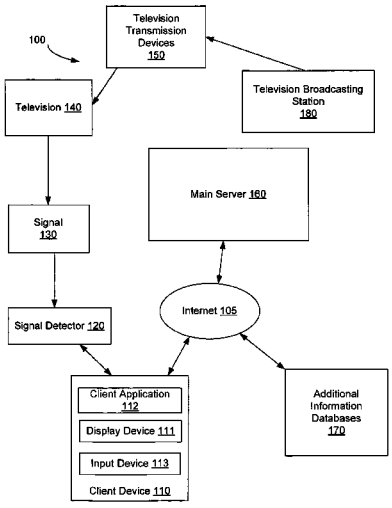

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FIG. 1

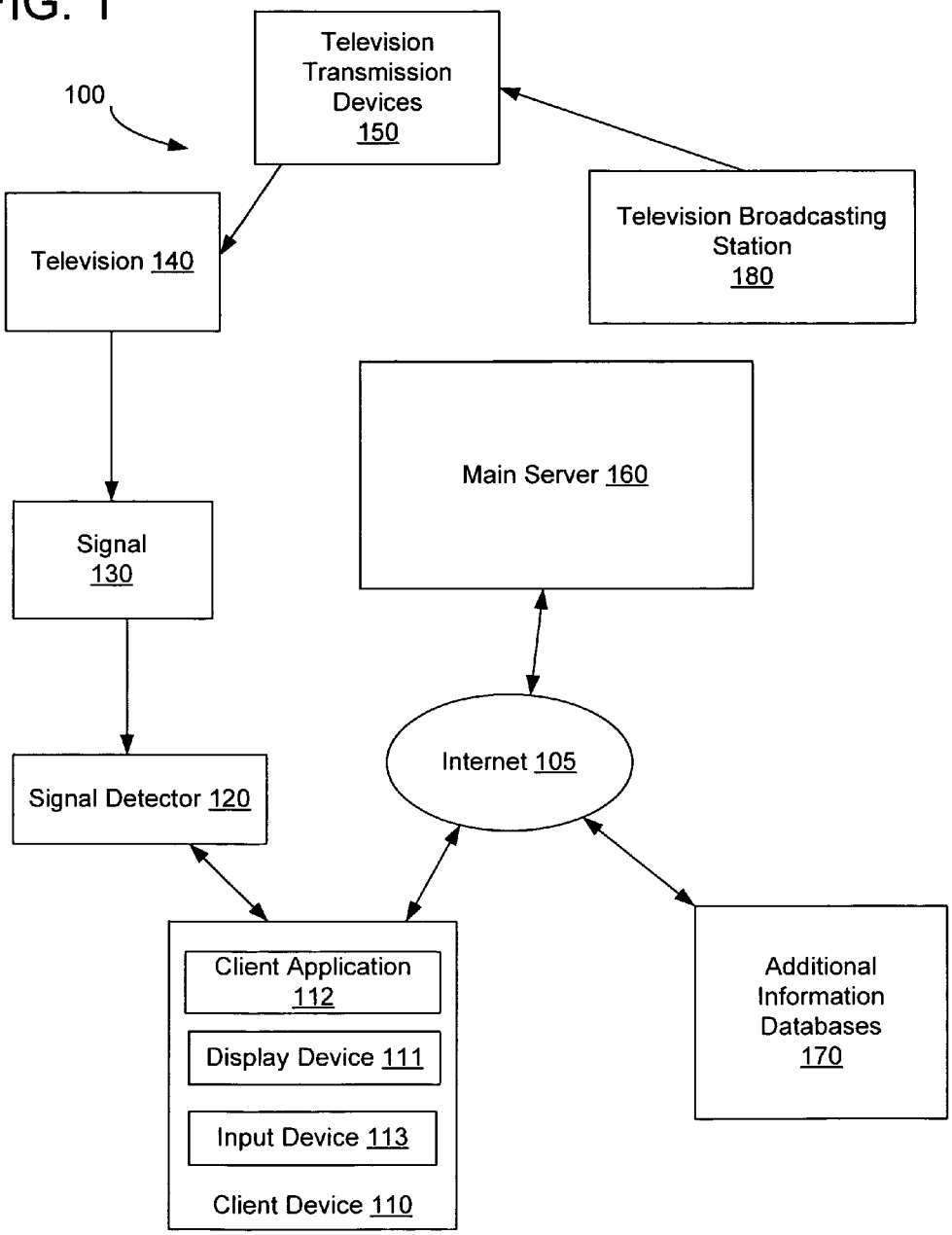

100
Television Transmission Devices 150
Television 140
Television Broadcasting Station 180
Main Server 160
Signal 130
Internet 105
Signal Detector 120
Client Application 112
Display Device 111
Input Device 113
Client Device 110
Additional Information Databases 170

FIG. 2

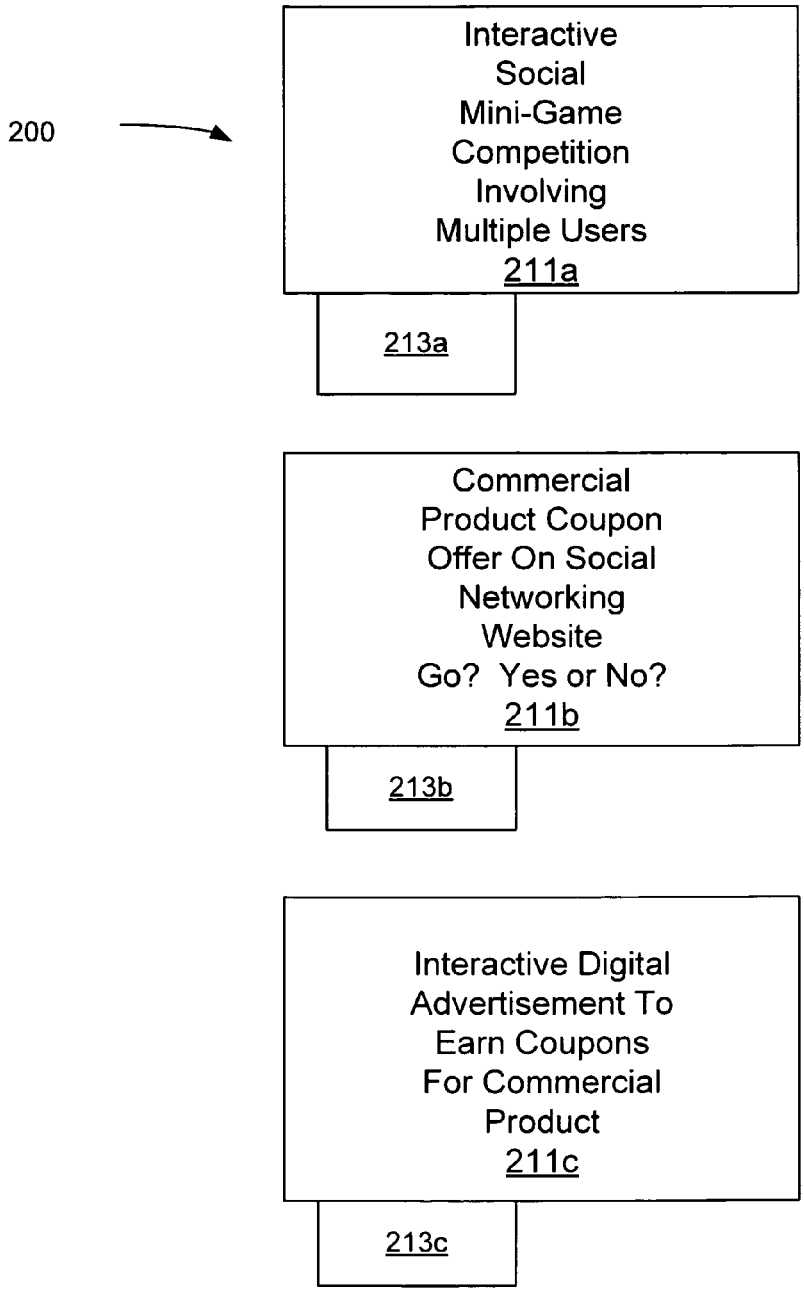
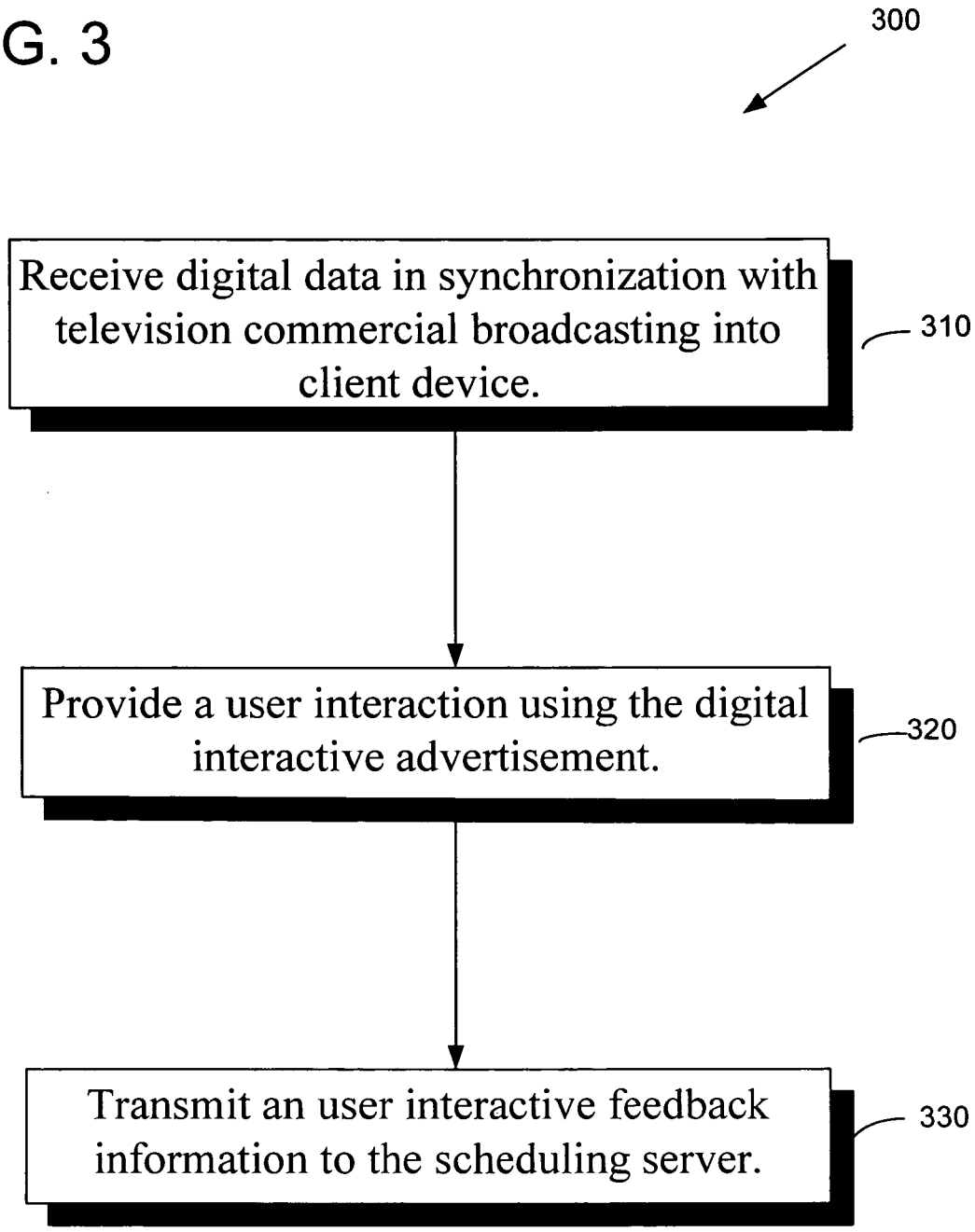

200
Interactive Social Mini-Game Competition Involving Multiple Users
211a
213a
Commercial Product Coupon Offer On Social Networking Website Go? Yes or No?
211b
213b
Interactive Digital Advertisement To Earn Coupons For Commercial Product
211c
213c

FIG. 3


300
Receive digital data in synchronization with television commercial broadcasting into client device.
310
Provide a user interaction using the digital interactive advertisement.
320
Transmit an user interactive feedback information to the scheduling server.
330

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR SYNCHRONIZING ON-AIR COMMERCIAL PROGRAMMING WITH INTERACTIVE APPLICATIONS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to interactive content. More particularly, the present invention relates to interactive content synchronized with on-air television programming

2. Background Art

Interactive television is well known in the art. Interactive television usually allows viewers to interact with the contents related to on-air television programming. For example, reality television shows and game shows are two types of television programming that allow viewers to interact via devices connected to the Internet to affect, for example, the outcome of the show by voting or other interactions. Devices providing on-air television interactivity may include mobile devices such as cell phones, general purpose computing devices such as laptop, desktop, or tablet PCs, integrated IPTVs hosting interactive applications such as Google TV, Direct TV, WebTV and other devices allowing viewers to interact with on-air television programming.

ETV is one well-known example of interactive television. ETV often requires viewers to have a computer connected to the World Wide Web and to be in proximity to a television. During the broadcast of on-air television programming, the user can access program specific Internet website that is synchronized to the on-air television programming, providing much deeper viewer engagement.

While interactive television programs can be a source of excitement for many viewers, viewers may regard commercial breaks during such television programming with less enthusiasm. Indeed, many viewers prerecord television programs to avoid viewing commercials. Unfortunately, this significantly decreases the value of television advertising, a significant financial revenue stream for television networks.

To encourage viewers to pay attention during advertising, it would be beneficial for advertisers to enhance the excitement of commercials. By creating more engaging commercials, advertisers will be able to engage the audience and leave a positive impression towards the advertised products, services, or messages, thereby conducting a more effective marketing campaign.

Accordingly, there is a need to overcome the drawbacks and deficiencies in the art by providing a way to engage the audiences more effectively for advertising related to on-air television content.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

There are provided systems and methods for synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive applications, substantially as shown in and/or described in connection with at least one of the figures, as set forth more completely in the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The features and advantages of the present invention will become more readily apparent to those ordinarily skilled in the art after reviewing the following detailed description and accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. **1** presents a diagram of a system for implementing the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive applications, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **2** presents a diagram showing three instances of the user interface presented by the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive applications, according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. **3** shows a flowchart describing the steps, according to one embodiment of the present invention, by which on-air commercial programming may be synchronized with interactive applications.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present application is directed to a system and method for the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive applications. The following description contains specific information pertaining to the implementation of the present invention. One skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention may be implemented in a manner different from that specifically discussed in present application. Moreover, some of the specific details of the invention are not discussed in order not to obscure the invention. The specific details not described in the present application are within the knowledge of a person of ordinary skill in the art. The drawings in the present application and their accompanying detailed description are directed to merely exemplary embodiments in the invention. To maintain brevity, other embodiments of the invention, which use the principles of the present invention, are not specifically described in the present application and are not specifically illustrated by the present drawings.

FIG. **1** presents a diagram of a system for implementing the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive application, according to one embodiment of the present invention. Diagram **100** of FIG. **1** includes Internet **105**, client device **110**, signal detector **120**, signal **130**, television **140**, main server **160**, additional information databases **170**, television transmission devices **150**, and television broadcasting station **180**. Client device **110** includes display device **111**, client application **112**, and input device **113**.

The configuration shown in diagram **100** illustrates the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive applications. Synchronization between on-air commercial programming and client device **110** may commence when client device **110** begins accepting digital data transmitted from main server **160**. Main server **160** may begin transmitting digital data to client device **110** at approximately the same time television broadcasting station **180** begins transmitting on-air commercial programming to television **140** through television transmission devices **150**. Main server **160** stops transmitting digital data through Internet **105** when television broadcasting station **180** ends broadcasting of on-air commercial programming. An on-air commercial programming is a series of individual commercials broadcasted in tandem. On-air commercial programming is interspersed throughout regular noncommercial television programming. In other embodiments, main server **160** may continue transmitting digital data despite an end to the broadcasting of on-air commercial programming, and a return of normal television programming.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, the digital data may be related to products and/or messages advertised in the corresponding on-air commercial programming. For example, a particular commercial may pertain to the selling of luxury automobiles and the corresponding digi-

tal data may contain a group of electronic advertisements and discounts related to the purchase of luxury automobiles. Digital data is programmed into main server **160** or uploaded into main server **160** from any other information source, such as a server or database. Digital data transferred across Internet **105** or across any other network system may be encoded for security purposes. In other embodiments, digital data transmitted from main server **160** need not necessarily be related or relevant to the contents of on-air commercial programming.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, a single server, main server **160**, sends digital data to client device **110** based on geographic location of client device **110**. Main server **160** may present different digital data to different geographical locations. For example, client device **110** may receive different digital data as digital data is transported across different states boundaries because each state may have different local affiliates providing different schedules for on-air commercial programming. Thus, main server **160** may be programmed to send different digital data to different geographical locations through Internet **105** or through other network systems. Additionally, main server **160** may be programmed to send same digital data to all geographical locations. In yet other embodiments, main server **160** may be programmed to block transmission of digital data to particular geographic locations, for example to comply with regional licensing restrictions.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, main server **160** sends digital data to client device **110** directly through Internet **105**. In other embodiments, main server **160** may send digital data to a secondary server. Secondary server may then transmit digital data to client device **110**. A secondary server is usually located nearer to client device **110** than main server **160** is located to client device **110**. Secondary server may transmit all digital data received from main server **160** to client device **110** immediately or during program specified time intervals.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, additional information databases **170** may assist main server **160** with transmitting digital data to client device **110**. Additional information databases **170** may store vast numbers of user profile information, such as geographical information, time zone information, Internet **105** protocol addresses, or other online information regarding user and user's client device **110**. Main server **160** may access the user profile information through Internet **105** or other types of network systems. By analyzing the user profile information stored in additional information databases **170**, main server **160** may better determine when to send digital data to client device **110**, geographical location to send digital data to, and which parts of the digital data may be transmitted to client device **110**. User profile information stored in additional information databases **170** may be updated, altered or deleted. User profile information in additional information databases **170** may be updated by programming within additional information databases **170** or by uploading information from other sources into additional information databases **170**.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, client application **112** is a standalone software application that may be downloaded onto client device **110**. Client application **112** may be programmed to synchronize client device **110** beginning to accept digital data from main server **160** through Internet **105** with television broadcasting station **180** broadcasting on-air commercial programming broadcasted to television **140** through television transmission devices **150**. Client application **112** may be programmed to control when client device **110** may end reception of digital data from main server **160**. Moreover, client application **112** may be programmed to control which parts of digital data client device **110** may accept. In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, client application **112** may be configured to allow client device **110**, which is ready to receive digital data transmitted from main server **160**, to accept, indiscriminately, all digital data transmitted from main server **160**. In alternative embodiments of the invention, client application **112** may be configured to allow client device **110** to accept only a subset of the digital data transmitted from main server **160**.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, client application **112** may be configured in such a manner that client device **110** may not begin accepting digital data until signal detector **120** detects signal **130** from television **140**. Signal detector **120** may be located within client device **110**, although in other embodiments, signal detector **120** may be externally attached to client device **110** and attachment may be achieved with physical or wireless connection. Client application **112** may be configured to activate signal detector **120** to detect for signal **130**. Signal **130** may be emitted from television **140** and may comprise audio frequency, light frequency or any other types of frequencies. In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, signal detector **120** may be configured to detect for signal **130** in the form of audio frequencies emitted from television **140** related to on-air commercial programming. For example, when television **140** begins showing on-air commercial programming, the sound emitted from television **140** may be signal **130**, and signal **130** may travel through the air to reach nearby client device **110**. When signal detector **120** detects signal **130**, signal detector **120** may sends an electronic alert to client application **112**, and client application **112** may, in response to receiving an electronic alert, activate client device **110** to begin accepting digital data from main server **160**.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, client device **110** may stop receiving digital data from main server **160** when main server **160** ends transmission of digital data to client device **110**. Main server **160** may end transmission of digital data to client device **110** at any time, such as at the end of the broadcasting of on-air commercial programming from television broadcasting station **180**. Main server **160** may also transmit an electronic alert to client device **110** to cause client device **110** to end reception of any further incoming digital data. Furthermore, user may personally deactivate client device **110** which may cause client device **110** to end reception of digital data. In alternative embodiments of the invention, client device **110** may be programmed to end reception of digital data at a particular time.

After client application **112** converts digital data into viewable digital data, display device **111** may display the viewable digital data. For example, viewable digital data may contain advertising information such as digital coupons or special offers. Client application **112**, upon receiving such digital data, may convert such digital data into viewable coupons and special offers advertisements and display them through display device **111**. Display device **111** should not be limited to any particular hardware type. In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, display device **111** may be a liquid crystal display (LCD) screen built into client device **110**. In alternative embodiments of the invention, display device **111** may be another type of display hardware, such as cathode-ray tubes (CRT) monitors. Moreover, display device **111** may be externally attached to client device **110** through physical or wireless connection. In yet other embodiments, display device **111** may also be touch sensitive and may serve as input device **113** as well.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, input device **113** may allow the user of client device **110** to interact with digital data presented on display device **111**. Input device **113** may be built into client device **110** or may be externally attached to client device **110**. In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, input device **130** comprises a miniature QWERTY keyboard built into client device **110**. In alternative embodiments, input device **113** may be a miniature keyboard, a touch sensitize virtual keyboard screen or any other type of input hardware. In yet other embodiments, input device **113** may function on voice command or on other physical acts of activation.

User information, which may be generated from user interactions with digital data, may be transmitted to and stored within main server **160** for main server **160** or client device **110** to access at a later time. During user interactions with digital data, client device **110** may also alert main server **160** to transmit user information back to client device **110**. User information may be transferred between client device **110** and main server **160** through Internet **105**. In other embodiments of the invention, user information may be transmitted between main server **160** and client device **110** through a secondary server or through other network configurations.

In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, main server **160** may also interact with and respond to client device **110** based, partly or wholly, on user information stored on main server **160**. For example, main server **160** may maintain a database of coupon offers popular in the past with user of client device **110**. Thus, main server **160** may send such popular coupon offers to a user during future interactions with that user through client device **110**, in order to increase the likelihood of user accepting and using those coupons.

In this embodiment of the invention, client device **110** may be a non-portable device, such as a personal desktop computer or server. In alternative embodiments, client device **110** may be a mobile device, such as an iPad, iPhone, tablet PC or laptop. In yet other embodiments, client device **110** and television **140** may be combined into a single device.

Moving to FIG. **2**, FIG. **2** presents a diagram of three instances of the user interface presented by the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive applications, according to one embodiment of the present invention. Diagram **200** of FIG. **2** includes display device, **211***a*, **211***b*, and **211***c*, and input device **213***a*, **213***b* and **213***c*. Display device **211***a*, **211***b* and **211***c* may each correspond to display device **111** in FIG. **1** and input device **213***a*, **213***b* and **213***c* may each correspond to input device **113** in FIG. **1**.

Display device **211***a* is an alternative embodiment of display device **111** in FIG. **1**. Display Device **211***a* may display an interactive social videogame that allows multiple users of client devices **110** to participate simultaneously. In this interactive social videogame multiple users may compete against each other. Using input device **213***a*, a user of client device **110** may compete against other users by attempting to answer all given questions correctly and in a shortest amount of time. When main server **160** detects the first user who answers all questions correctly, main server **160** may send coupons and prizes to that user's client device **110**, main server **160** may end the previous social videogame, and main server **160** may begin another new social videogame. Before the start of each new social videogame, main server **160** may allocate a couple of minutes towards waiting for more players to join the social videogame. Once the social videogame begins, main server **160** may prevent any additional users from participating in such an ongoing social videogame.

Display device **211***b* is an alternative embodiment of display device **111** in FIG. **1**. Display device **211***b* may display information regarding an offer to earn coupons for a particular product advertised on on-air commercial programming. Information displayed may present a user with an offer to visit a specific social networking website for a chance to earn coupons. User of client device **110** may accept the offer to visit a specific social networking website, and that user may be directed to the social networking website. Moreover, the social networking website may prompt the user to create an account on the website and answer additional questions before offering any coupons to the user. Additional questions may be related to any topic, including user's personal life or user's opinions towards an advertised product. The user may use input device **213***b* to accept the request to visit the social networking website and to perform any other further actions required to obtain the coupon offer.

Display device **211***c* is an alternative embodiment of display device **111** in FIG. **1**. Display device **211***c* may display a digital interactive advertisement that may allow the user to earn coupons for a particular product. In this example, the user may earn one or more coupons by interacting with the digital interactive advertisement. The digital interactive advertisement may require the user to deliver to a number of distinct users by email, an advertisement, as a prerequisite to receiving the coupon. The user may perform the required action through input device **213***c*. When main server **160** detects that all emails have been sent, main server **160** may electronically deliver a coupon to user's email account and may alert that user of such action through the client device **110**. Digital interactive advertisement may be presented to client device **110** during the showing of on-air commercial programming on television **140** and/or beyond such showing.

Moving to FIG. **3**, FIG. **3** shows a flowchart describing the steps, according to one embodiment of the present invention, by which the synchronizing on-air commercial programming with interactive application may be provided. Certain details and features have been left out of flowchart **300** that are apparent to a person of ordinary skill in the art. For example, a step may comprise one or more sub-steps or may involve specialized equipment or materials, as known in the art. While steps **310** through **330** indicated in flowchart **300** are sufficient to describe on embodiment of the present invention, other embodiments of the invention may utilize steps different from those shown in flowchart **300**.

Referring to step **310** of flowchart **300** in FIG. **3** and diagram **100** of FIG. **1**, step **310** of flowchart **300** comprises client application **112** in client device **110** receiving digital data from main server **160**. In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, client application **112** may be configured to allow client device **110** to accept digital data only if signal detector **120** detects proper signal **130** emitted from television **140**. When signal detector **120** detects signal **130** emitted from television **140**, signal detector **120** may send an electronic alert to client application **112**, and client application **112** may activate client device **110** to accept digital data. Client application **112** may store information received from main server **160** into memory storage within client device **110**. In alternative embodiments of the invention in FIG. **1**, as described previously, client device **110** may be configured to accept digital data from main server **160** without requiring signal detector **120** to detect signal **130**.

Referring to step **320** of flowchart **300** in FIG. **3** and diagram **100** of FIG. **1**, step **320** of flowchart **300** comprises client application **112**, client device **110** and display device **111** providing an interactive environment for the user through display device **111** using digital data received in step **310**. In one embodiment of the invention as shown in FIG. **1**, step **320** may occur after client device **110** receives digital data trans-

mitted from main server **160**. Thus, referring to diagram **200** of FIG. **2**, after step **310**, display device **111** may appear similar to display device **211***b*, in which the user may have an opportunity to access a website, such as a social networking website, a broadcaster website or an advertiser website, in order to claim coupons and prizes. As previously described, digital data may provide an interactive environment, which may allow the user to visit the social networking site and to perform other actions in order to claim the coupon or prize.

Referring to step **330** of flowchart **300** in FIG. **3** and diagram **100** of FIG. **1**, step **330** of flowchart **300** comprises client device **110** and main server **160**. In one embodiment of this invention shown in FIG. **1**, client device **110** may transmit user feedback information generated from interaction received after step **320** between user and interactive environment to main server **160**. Thus, referring to diagram **200** of FIG. **2**, after step **310**, display device **111** may appear similar to display device **211***b*, where the user may be prompted to go to a social networking website to claim product coupons and prizes. When user accepts or declines access to the social networking website, this action may generate user feedback information and this feedback information may be transmitted from client device **110** to main server **160**. As stated earlier, this interactive feedback information may be stored on main server **160**. Subsequent information gathered from user interactions within the social networking website may also be transmitted to main server **160**. As described earlier, main server **160** may use the user feedback information to determine when to present coupons or prizes to the user.

From the above description of the invention it is manifest that various techniques can be used for implementing the concepts of the present invention without departing from its scope. Moreover, while the invention has been described with specific reference to certain embodiments, a person of ordinary skills in the art would recognize that changes can be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and the scope of the invention. As such, the described embodiments are to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive. It should also be understood that the invention is not limited to the particular embodiments described herein, but is capable of many rearrangement, modifications, and substitutions without departing from the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for synchronizing interactive application content with broadcasting program information, the method comprising:

receiving a signal emitted from a television receiving and televising a broadcast from a television broadcasting station;

enabling a reception of a digital data from a server by a computing device not receiving the broadcast from the television broadcasting station, in response to the receiving of the signal without transmitting to the server a request for the digital data, without transmitting to the server any portion of the signal emitted from the television, and without transmitting to the server any information generated from the signal emitted from the television, the digital data being separate from the broadcast by the television broadcasting station;

receiving the digital, data from the server by the computing device in synchronization with an on-air commercial programming being received by the television;

providing an interactive environment on a display of the computing device using the digital data;

transmitting a user feedback information generated from a user action within the interactive environment to the server; and

disabling the reception of the digital data by the computing device in synchronization with a return of regular non-commercial programming through the television transmitted from the television broadcasting station.

2. The method of claim **1** wherein the signal comprises audio or light emitted from the television.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the digital data is an offer to win coupons or other prizes by accessing a social networking website, a broadcaster website or an advertiser website to claim coupons or other prizes.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein the digital data comprises a social game allowing multiple users to compete for coupons or prizes.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein the computing device comprises an application allowing a user to send product coupons or prizes to other users.

6. The method of claim **1**, wherein the computing device comprises an application allowing a user of the computing device to communicate with other users in order to persuade them to buy a product.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein the digital data comprises an interactive advertisement prompting a user with questions to answer before allowing the user to claim coupons or prizes.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein the digital data comprises a single-player game that allows a user to win coupons if the user wins the game.

9. A computing device for synchronizing interactive application content with broadcasting program information, the computing device comprising:

a display screen;

the computing device configured to:

receive a signal emitted from a television receiving and televising a broadcast from a television broadcasting station;

enable a reception of a digital data from a server by a computing device not receiving the broadcast from the television broadcasting station, in response to receiving the signal without transmitting to the server a request for the digital data, without transmitting to the server any portion of the signal emitted from the television, and without transmitting to the server any information generated from the signal emitted from the television, the digital data being separate from the broadcast by the television broadcasting station;

receive the digital data from the server by the computing device in synchronization with an on-air commercial programming being received by the television;

provide an interactive environment on a display of the computing device using the digital data;

transmit a user feedback information generated from a user action within the interactive environment to the server; and

disable the reception of the digital data by the computing device in synchronization with a return of regular noncommercial programming through the television transmitted from the television broadcasting station.

10. The computing device of claim **9**, wherein the signal comprises audio or light emitted from the television.

11. The computing device of claim **9**, wherein the digital data is an offer to win coupons or other prizes by accessing a social networking website, a broadcaster website or an advertiser website to claim coupons or other prizes.

12. The computing device of claim **9**, wherein the digital data comprises a social game allowing multiple users to compete for coupons or prizes.

13. The computing device of claim **9** further comprising an application allowing a user to send product coupons or prizes to other users.

14. The computing device of claim **9** further comprising an application allowing a user of the computing device to communicate with other users in order to persuade them to buy a product.

15. The computing device of claim **9**, wherein the digital data comprises an interactive advertisement prompting a user with questions to answer before allowing the user to claim coupons or prizes.

16. The computing device of claim **9**, wherein the digital data comprises a single-player game that allows a user to win coupons if the user wins the game.

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